

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007

## **OA's U8's Weekly News**

### **The Successes of the Reds at the Marlow Festival and the Blues at the Tring Festival on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

This week the Reds took part in the Marlow Festival. To our knowledge this was the first time an OAs team had competed in this event. Meanwhile the Blues took part in the more familiar Tring Festival, where they were Under 7 Cup winners last season.

Well done and thanks to all who turned out to represent the club and our age group at both events. Thanks also to the coaches for looking after the teams.

The Yellows and Greens trained at home this week in preparation for the Hertfordshire County Tag Festival on 15<sup>th</sup> April.

#### **The Reds**

The Reds had a great day out at the Marlow Festival on Sunday. We all met up in the U8's area amid the quiet chaos created by many clubs with teams in various age groups of the competition. Nerves were fraught as we waited to find out who, where and when we were playing and then finding out that we weren't even named in the programme. However, luckily for us a rogue team Oadby Wyggs didn't show up, so we had their slots! (Apparently our name had got confused on a garbled telephone message to complete the programme - we are now going to find a mascot and name him Oadby Wygg!)

After finding our pitch and warming up, our slightly nervous coaches **Tim Birchinnall** and **Guy Palmer** did a great job in preparing our team for the task ahead. Our confidence was not sufficient at this stage so we decided that maybe it was not wise to pitch camp and erect the gazebo in case of an early exit!

Guy Palmer was on call straight away as our nominated Referee. However, after much negotiating (to the relief of Guy) the coach from another team was elected to referee and Guy, although ending up watch-less and pen-less was relieved to concentrate on our team!

#### **Game 1 - OA's 5 V Marlow 3** (the Hosts)

We were off to a nervous start and the Hosts, obviously having the advantage of familiar territory, gave a top class performance from the off, with good tagging in defence and incisive running in the attack. However we ground out a narrow but deserved victory.

### **Game 2 - OA's 4 V Sandals 7**

Sandals (or *Scandals* as they were nicknamed by one or two of our very supportive parents!) were a strong side and the pace of the match increased with a few weaving runs from them that showed up some weaknesses in our defence, but nevertheless the first half ended fairly even with a 1 try advantage to Scandals at half time. The second half turned when a breakaway run from **Euan Wattley** was halted almost clear of their last man - he was on the receiving end of a flying tackle that would have been a great stop under next year's rules but seemed a little over the top for tag rugby. Unfortunately, the re-start was awarded to the opposition and one of those weaving runs ensured a try the other way! Two tries down and a couple of missed try scoring opportunities later, we started to lose our poise and the match ended with a score that didn't reflect the narrowness of the first three quarters of the game.

Halfway through the group stages though, with one win, one loss and two big guns ahead of us (Wasps and London Irish), the strategic decision that the gazebo was staying firmly in the box was maintained!

### **Game 3 - OA's 6 V Wasps 5**

This was a very tensely fought match and a narrow win that left the supporters on the edge of their seats. Thankfully Dallaglio did not make an appearance and McGeechan must regret that decision.

The tension was mounting as we waited for the final game of the group stages against the green shirts of the mighty Exiles (London Irish). However, as Saracens has given them a pasting in the Guinness Premiership on Friday night, we hoped their spirits would be low.

At this point we weren't sure of our position in the league. As some parents were due to have their child's christening and important auditions to attend, Luke Benfield's mum enquired of the match official if we could assume we were clear to leave after the matches, only to be told that we weren't going anywhere! Indeed, we were sitting top of our group!!!!!!!. This gave us the boost we needed and the Gazebo went up during the two match break before the game against London Irish.

### **Game 4 - OA's 4 V London Irish 1**

The Exiles were no match for the Oadby Wyggs who by this stage were really fired up and gelling as a great team, the defence against some strong London Irish runners was absolutely

superb, and set the platform for some excellent counter attacks and a final score of 4-1. Not even Catt and Geraghty could have stopped our Reds!

At this stage we knew that our toughest competition had been a "Scandal" and this proved right as they just beat us by 1 point to be top of our group and make it to the Cup Final. However, all was not lost as the Reds were to play in the final for the Shield. By this stage the boys were elated and didn't care much, as their understanding of the rules was somewhat behind ours which wasn't saying much!

The Final loomed - to celebrate and with boosted confidence we decided to erect the gazebo - only to find that the finals were to be played at the opposite end of the ground to where we had played the first four matches!

### **PLATE FINAL - OA's 8 V Maidenhead 5**

This was a truly great performance from the entire team. Special praise must go to the flankers who put in an excellent performance in defence - charging off from the re-starts (sometimes a little too quickly in the opinion of the opposing parents!) and closing down the attacking runners, forcing turnover balls and generally making a nuisance of themselves. In attack they created space and off loaded to the wingers and full backs. We scored eight tries in total with some great solo runs from **Toby Spence, Toby Palmer, Rory Superfine** and **Ed Birchinnall** plus, more importantly, several 'team' tries where the ball passed through several phases (Champagne Rugby ..... almost!!!). Maidenhead tried valiantly to respond to the Red wave but to no avail and the final whistle went - VICTORY was rightly ours!

The Reds were dignified in Victory. Once safely off the pitch and after a post-match team talk with our victorious coach Tim Birchinnall, Guy Palmer needing picked up from somewhere over the other side of the pitch (as he was too nervous to watch all the match), they suddenly realised that they had won the Shield and great cheers were heard along with a good show of solid team spirit - much patting on backs and cheers of well done from our parents and players alike.

This really was a great team effort: coaches, players and parents working together to make this a truly memorably and enjoyable day. There was no fuss about substitutions. Between the games the boys all rested (thanks to the help of Game Boy whoever he is!) Our on-loan Yellows (**Harry Newman-Booth** and **Rory Superfine**) certainly deserve a special mention and thank you for some excellent try scoring and team support and spirit.

#### ***Special honours:***

Top Try Scorers: **Rory Superfine, Toby Spence, Toby Palmer**, with some valiantly fought tries from **Euan Wattle** and **Simon Jones**.

Top Taggers: **Ed Birchinnall, Luke Benfield** and **Ryan Doherty**.

Support Play and Assistance to Try Scorers: **Harry Newman-Booth, Jake Mlodecki** well deserved.

Each player quite rightly deserves a special mention for brilliant team support and hard work, well done boys and looking forward to the Hertfordshire Tag Festival on the 15th April 2007.

*Report by Birchinnall, Benfield & Palmer*

## **The Blues**

An early start for the team, particularly with the clocks springing forward an hour (for most but not all of the parents!), saw the Blues and their parents meeting, wiping the sleep from their eyes, on the fields of Tring at a ridiculously early hour. That probably explained their spectacularly unsuccessful first couple of attempts to raise the gazebo. Where was the team Cub Scout when you needed him (trying to get back from his boys skiing trip apparently). It probably also explained the team photo where the Blues looked in serious need of some Class A drugs to get them going. Perhaps it was the tension of the big event.

Certainly that tension was there for all to see when Harpenden approached us and asked if we minded playing our first game early, instead of them, as the Welwyn team had not turned up yet. Was it a devious trick being pulled by Harpenden to try to catch the Blues cold? Perhaps they'd seen the team photo and thought it was worth a shot? It certainly took a long time before the coaching staff were satisfied that there was no disadvantage to the Blues in doing so. And people think this is just a fun game and exercise for their small kids!

Meanwhile the only person not displaying tension at all was Russ Arpino, who was instead displaying signs of still being cheerfully sozzled from the night before.

### **Game 1 – OAs 8 v Hemel Hempstead (Camelot) 2**

After a slow start, when they conceded a try to the first play of the game due to some pretty dozy defending, the Blues gradually hit their stride with **Jonathan Olive** on fire and running in 4 tries. **William Stewart** (1) was alert enough (obviously as his excessively keen parents had woken him up a lot earlier than everybody else) to pick up a ball behind his own line that Hemel thought had been given as a try and ran the length of the pitch to score. **Cameron Clark** (1) ran in a signature side-stepping try, **Charlie Moffat** (1) ran in a fine solo try and **Luke Simpson** (1) appeared on the end of a fine passing move to touch down as the Blues ran out comfortable winners.

### **Game 2 – OAs 6 v Welwyn RFC 3**

The Blues were never really troubled by the opposition and won comfortably. The stand out tries were from **Charlie Moffat** (2), who was like a blond hair (should that be hare?) running straight

down the left wing, and **William Stewart** (1), with **Ethan Arpino** (1) getting his name onto the score sheet for the first time after great support work. Other well tries were ground out by **Cameron Clark** (1) and **Archie Radovanovic** (1). The margin of victory would have been higher but for a referee who didn't realise that there was a 7 tag turnover ball rule, even after **Coach Clark** had a word and he'd checked the fact with the independent marshal on the sidelines. As the tackle count in favour of the Blues rose well into double figures there was much head-scratching on the pitch and on the side lines. Coach Clark took to counting the tags out loud, whilst instructing the players to disagree with the match official, but this has not influence on the referee. Nevertheless, the game was won and the individual interpretation of the laws did not influence the result.

### **Game 3 – OAs 6 v Harpenden 4**

After a couple of warm up games it was time for the crunch battles. Parents who had, until then, been happy to chat to their friends from the Harpenden area suddenly pulled the shutters down as their local rivals took the field. The tension really began to build, and Russ's hangover really started to kick in. The Blues got off to a great start with **William Parkinson** (1) finishing off a lovely passing move and **Ruairi McGowan** (2) running through their defence for a great individual score. When Ruairi touched down again after another great passing move, things were looking good for the Blues. However, Harpenden are not hot rivals for nothing and pulled back to level the score at 4 each and were pressing hard at the Blues line. In the centre of the pitch the line was defended by frantic aggressive tagging from **Cameron Clark** and **Jonathan Olive**, with **William Stewart** and the winger **William Parkinson** providing some useful second layer cover. Harpenden seemed to have crossed to take the lead but the ref, bless him, thought otherwise and in the next play of the game **William Stewart** (2) went on a long run to score. Again Harpenden pressed hard but OAs turned the ball over and **Cameron Clark** (1) ran in the try that gave us the buffer to break the Harpenden hearts. It was a very close game that, at moments, could easily have gone against the Blues, but it didn't!

### **Game 4 – OAs 5 v Cheshunt 3**

During our other games, Cheshunt had been quietly winning all their games and getting pretty confident along the way. "We can beat anybody as long as we concentrate", they were heard to say, as an echo of Andy Robinson according to Coach Clark. Mercifully they must have decided not to concentrate and the Blues won a close game that was a good spectacle for all watching. Close enough to tempt the Cheshunt parents also to be heard to gasp in dismay "oh no, he's gone into touch" but then deny it when the ref sought confirmation. Another great **Jonathan Olive** (2) try followed a passing movement where every member of the Blues touched the ball again revealed the capabilities of the squad. And if that wasn't enough, a twinkling side-stepping try from that elusive runner, **Archie Radovanovic** (1), will live in the memory for a long time. But the move that probably broke the Cheshunt resistance was **Cameron Clark** (2) gliding down the touchline, chased by Cheshunt's main man and most vocal player. There could only be one winner (and as we know, nobody "out-vocals" Cameron) and as the Cheshunt player made his last attempt to grab Cameron's tag, missing by millimeters, allowing Cameron to score, the look of despair on his face shouted volumes. Again, the Blues won this game not only by scoring

good tries, but also due to strong work in defence with **Cameron Clark** and **Archie Radovanovic** effectively patrolling the centre of the pitch with **William Stewart** moping up any Cheshunt breaks.

### **Game 5 – OAs 11 v Tring B 5**

There then followed the final game of the group stages, when the Blues outclassed Tring's second team and ran out comfortable winners. Eight boys got on the score sheet in this game, which was a testament to the ability of the team to pass the ball and playing a fast and flowing running style of game. There was usual lesson of passing the ball to **Cameron Clark** (1) in the centre and watching him score. More spectacularly, however, this game was a great platform for the ball to be passed to the wings to allow the running abilities of **Ruairi McGowan** (3) and **Charlie Moffatt** (2) to secure well worked scores down the wider channels. Any number of the tries scored could be highlighted here, but **Archie Radovanovic's** (1) great run through the defence and magnificent long pass at pace to **Ruairi McGowan** for the score was probably the pick of the bunch, just ahead of yet another mazy run and try from the big man. Other scorers were **Ethan Arpino** (1), **Daniel Hanlon** (1), **Jonathan Olive** (1) and **Luke Simpson** (1). The line was valiantly defended on this occasion by **Archie Radovanovic** and **Luke Simpson**.

Having won our group outright and unbeaten, we then had some wait to find out who we would meet as winner of the other group in the Cup Final. There were no unbeaten teams in the other group. There had been draws and three teams were rumoured to be the other finalists – Chinnor, Fullerians and Tring A. In the end, Tring A, our regular finals adversaries from last season emerged from the crowd as the finalists we were to face.

### **Game 6 – Cup Final - OAs 6 v Tring A 8**

And so to the final against Tring's first team. The head-to-head record to date was that the Blues had lost to them in the final of the U7s Cup at Bedford last season, only to then beat them in the final of the U7s at Tring, the U7s Cup Final at the Hertfordshire Festival last season, and in the home fixture earlier this season. With this record, you might have felt we had the upper hand. However, all those games had been close so it was set up to be a great final.

Immediately it became apparent that the Tring A team were, to say the least, "*up for it*" and they hurtled into the game right from the start, taking an early lead. No matter, the Blues scoring machine would surely not be denied. But a rare dropped pass led to turnover ball which the mistake-free Tring team converted. 2 – 0. Back came the Blues and in the face of staunch defending began to really pass the ball and, in a move that seemed to go on for ever, had the strong Tring defence stretched to breaking point only for the final pass to go to ground just short of the line. Back came Tring, but the Blues tackled them to a standstill and won the ball back. On the next play **Ruairi McGowan** broke free and seemed to be racing unopposed to the line only to discover he had been tagged. (Video evidence has been checked and quite clearly there was no call of "Tag" to bring him to a halt but the referee's decision is final.) Turnover ball - Tring scored twice quickly and suddenly the Blues were 4 – 0 down. This score, despite the fact the Blues had hardly put a foot wrong. Sadly for them Tring were playing error free rugby and taking

every chance they got. (Coach Clark was starting to think of the start Scotland had against Italy in the 6 Nations – a fine analogy that turned out to be!)

Just before the half time whistle the Blues got on the score sheet but the mood was low, unlike that of the Tring parents who were beside themselves with delight. After the great (“Haddenesk”) tactical and motivational skills of **Coach Clark** had been applied, the Blues came back out with renewed conviction and won the second half, with **Cameron Clark** (2) and **William Stewart** (2) at the heart of most things, aided by valuable tries from **Archie Radovanovic** (1) and **Luke Simpson** (1) but sadly the deficit was too great to make up (remember Italy) and Tring had secured their triumph 8 – 6. “*We’ve beaten you at last*” was the heartfelt but well meant cry from our good friend and adversary, the Tring coach Stephen Beeny, and this revealed quite how highly regarded the Blues are at this game. We had been narrowly beaten, but only by a very fine display from an exceptional opposition. The faces of the Blues (and, to be honest, their coach) were a picture at the traditional post match celebrations and awards ceremony. Just remember how much you disliked those feelings when you get to the County championship guys!

It was a great day, full of many laughs and some really great rugby. The final game didn’t quite go according to plan, but credit should go to Tring A for a faultless display of tag rugby when it really mattered in that first half. All the players in the entire squad gave a terrific account of themselves, by way of their skills, athleticism, organisation, dignity in winning and generosity in the final defeat. When our era of tag rugby passes in a few weeks time, we will miss the spectacle of this great Blues team winning fast and furious games against most sides put before them.

**Summary of the Tries:** Ethan Arpino – 2, Cameron Clark – 8, Daniel Hanlon – 1, Ruairi McGowan – 5, Charlie Moffatt – 5, Jonathan Olive – 7, William Parkinson – 1, Archie Radovanovic – 4, Luke Simpson – 3, William Stewart – 6.

**Summary of the Tag Index:** Ethan Arpino – 12, Cameron Clark – 32, Daniel Hanlon – 8, Ruairi McGowan – 16, Charlie Moffatt – 7, Jonathan Olive – 28, William Parkinson – 12, Jonathan Powdrell – 9, Archie Radovanovic – 24, Luke Simpson – 20, William Stewart – 17.

**Summary of the Tries "made" for team mates:** Cameron Clark – 2, Daniel Hanlon – 2, Charlie Moffatt – 1, Jonathan Powdrell – 1, Archie Radovanovic – 1, Luke Simpson – 1, William Stewart – 3.

*Report by Andy Stewart*